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Being in the Dark is Usually Not a Good Thing



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Chapter 1 by MediaMan

As you probably know, being in the dark is usually not a good thing. Darkness brings out the worst in some people--or at least in their minds. In the light, we can all see each other and ourselves--it's hard to hide much in the light. But in the dark? Well it's so much easier!

I remember the first time I found myself alone, in the dark. Of course, after awhile my eyes adjusted to the darkness and I realized there was still some light. But so little of the light was bright. Just enough to make shadows change in shape and size whenever I moved or closed my eyes to reopen them again. And although I knew I was in a safe place, still the darkness changed things.

Something else about darkness that changes things. Darkness magnifies sound. Did you know that?

Every sound you hear in the light fades into the surrounding buzz of other sounds. But in the darkness? Sounds slow down, magnify, and divide themselves from the buzz we normally hear. Even a rumble from your own tummy sounds more like a crater opening up in Yosemite, or a bullfrog bellowing out its call on the edge of a stagnant pond. Is this making more out of it than it really deserves. Probably. But then, darkness makes more out of things than they deserve.

On that first night I found myself alone, I was in my room, surrounded by familiar and well-used toys. My old cowboy hat sat sideways on top of the Mickey Mouse lamp. My big gray hippo lay beside me in the bed. (Yes, that's right. I slept with a hippo. Don't judge me, just accept it.) And then I heard it. A scraping sound--close, yet not close enough to touch. And not close enough to see. It was on one side of the room, near a window that faced the street. But it wasn't coming from the window. Or least I was pretty sure that was true. It sounded more like something in

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thing about those traps--the only ones that were really effective were the kind that had this jelly-like sticky stuff on them. It didn't really kill the mice or rats, but they got stuck to it and when my dad went down to check the traps he would find two or three mice stuck to each other with two or three traps stuck to them. It was like they all hit the stuff at the same time and then some mass mice hysteria made them run together like if they marshaled their forces they could defeat the sticky traps. Of course, if they had thought about it (can mice think?) running together only got them stuck to two or three traps instead of the one they were already stuck on.

Anyway, I was pretty certain that the scraping sound was inside of the wall but wasn't a mouse or rat. So what could it be? A chipmunk? On the third floor of an old house? Be realistic--why would a chipmunk climb to the third floor when all the food was on the first floor? And there was no food in my room! If my mother had one unbendable, unbreakable rule it was that food was eaten in the dining room at the table. No exceptions. Even my dad had to sit and have his football game snack at the dining room table! Sure took a lot of steam out of his cheering when he had to sit in the dining room and squint to see the picture on our old tv. He even complained once that he couldn't see his game from there, but mom would brook no opposition to her food rule. She simply replied that if he couldn't see his game from there maybe he didn't need to snack. Of course that brought on the inevitable quarrel about snacks versus healthy food (you know, the old battle between the wonderful taste of Cheetos versus the mind-numbing blandness of celery sticks.) So dad accepted things the way they were and went on his merry way (he just ate the snack faster and ran back into the living room.)

Sorry--I got sidetracked so let's return to the scraping in the wall. What was it? I quickly exhausted all my logical answers and then my imagination began taking over. Could the scraping be an evil dwarf, using a tiny pickaxe to try to open a hole quietly and quickly, a hole just large enough for him to sneak through while I was sleeping and take the tiny pickaxe and drive it deep into my.... Whoa! Wait a minute! An evil dwarf? In Lexington, Kentucky? I'm pretty sure there have not been any confirmed sightings of evil dwarves in Kentucky. So nix the dwarf. An evil elf? Again, no confirmed sightings of those either.

Oh and then it hit me--a tiny alien, who had been trapped in the wall during the last alien

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When I went downstairs the next morning for breakfast, I heard my mom telling my dad this: "George, I don't care how much it costs to fix. That hole in the chimney has got to be patched. If that silly squirrel wakes me up one more time while he's in that chimney storing acorns for the winter, I will go through the wall after him myself. I don't care if I have to use an ax to chop a hole in the wall to get to him. Now George, seriously, get that hole patched. Today! Early! I'll not be bothered by that squirrel again." And of course my dad, being the well-trained husband he was, said "Yes, dear. I'll take care of it today."

I couldn't believe it--a squirrel? Well there it was. The solution to my problem. The scraping in the wall was a goofy squirrel. It made me feel good to know what it was. But it was kind of disheartening to learn it was a fuzzy-tailed, big-toothed squirrel and not some evil dwarf or elf or alien. I mean if it had been an evil dwarf or elf or alien, I could have at least imagined having some kind of epic battle with them, besting them at sword-play or with a light saber, or with my superior intelligence. But in the end, all I had was a wall full of nuts and one squirrel.

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